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A STORY
— OF —
PEQUOT SWAMP;
AND
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AN INCIDENT OF MILL RIVER
(NOW SOUTHPORT)

IN "YE OLDEN TIME."

BY P. D. RIDGE.



SOUTHPORT, CONN.

BAKER & BULKLEY, PRINTERS AND PUBLISHERS.

1869.



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W. S. P. O'Brien
Oct. 6 1904

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PREFACE.

THE incidents of the early history of Southport, (in "ye olden time," MILL RIVER,) contained in the following pages, originally appeared in the SOUTHPORT CHRONICLE. They were written by a present resident of (so-called) Piquet Swamp. These stories as now presented have been carefully revised, and a few alterations have been made in them, but so slight is the change that it will hardly be noticed. Meeting with such favor as they did, by the readers of the CHRONICLE, it is thought that their publication in a pamphlet form will be acceptable to the people.

PUBLISHERS.

Pequot Swamp.

INTRODUCTION.

THE Northwestern part of Southport is called Pequot Swamp. Two hundred years ago, and more, was fought here the great battle between our English forefathers and the Pequot tribe of Indians. This locality—then a low-land forest—as the scene of the Pequot massacre, was named PEQUOT SWAMP, and has retained its title to this day. Many are the traditions handed down to us of this Pequot Swamp. It is, comparatively, but a few years ago since an effectual bugbear to frighten children into obedience, was to mention to them “the Indians,” who—their youthful imaginations led them to believe—were still lurking in the dark recesses of this dreaded forest. One of the “oldest inhabitants” of the village, relates to us, that he can recollect the time when the *superstitious* “children of a larger growth” were afraid to go near the “swamp” after dark, such was their dread of the red men. Not many years have elapsed since stone tomahawks and other relics of the Pequots, were frequently discovered in this Indian retreat. And now at this day, when

the farmer turns up its soil, flint arrow heads, such as are known to have been used by Indians in their battles, are often found.

The following account of the first white settlers in Pequot Swamp, is "*founded* on fact," although the imagination has been largely drawn upon to supply what history does not furnish.

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CHAPTER I.

A short time previous to the battle between the English and the Pequots, Enoch Griswold, an exile from the Providence Colony, settled on the border of Pequot Swamp. The house occupied by Enoch, a rude log cabin, was still standing (on the site now occupied by the Congregational Church) at the beginning of the present century.

Enoch's family consisted of Mary his wife, a daughter Esther, in her seventeenth year, and Josiah Morgan, a young friend and distant relative of the Griswolds. But a few Indians lived in the vicinity of Enoch's settlement, and these were friendly. The Pequots were driven in here from the eastern part of the Connecticut Colony, and all exterminated or carried away prisoners, except the few who escaped and were supposed to have fled and joined the Mohegans. But as the sequel will appear, they returned as soon as the English had left, and secreted themselves in an almost impenetrable thicket in the swamp. They doubtless resolved there to remain, until they had avenged, in a measure, their fallen comrades, by a retaliation on the white family they had noticed in the vicinity.

Those were good old Puritanical, patriarchal days. Enoch

and his family were happy. Their simple wants were easily supplied from the fruitful land and the bountiful sea. Often would they, in company with their Indian friends, spend the day in fishing, and return with well filled baskets, for our river and the Sasco were then teeming with finny beauties.

It was while returning from an excursion of this kind, one afternoon, that Esther, who had loitered behind the rest of the company, gathering wild flowers for a wreath, was suddenly missed. No great fears for her safety were at first entertained, as no hostile Indians were known to be within many miles, and it was a common occurrence for her to drop in at the neighboring wigwams and chat with the squaws and their children, her goodness of heart making her a general favorite. But as evening began to approach, and no Esther returned, strange forebodings filled the minds of Enoch and his household. Inquiries were made at the various wigwams, but no trace of her could be obtained. All passed a sleepless, anxious night, but as soon as morning dawned, the firm lip and dauntless eye of both Enoch and Josiah, told of their determination to ascertain if possible her whereabouts. They first retraced their steps, by the path they had come the day before, to the landing, (now White's Rocks) near the mouth of the river, that being the usual place for hauling up their canoes; it having just occurred to them that Esther, who being accustomed to use the paddle had often taken a row alone, might, for a little playful scare, have hidden until they were out of sight, and then returned to the boat and been carried out by the fierce squall that had arisen soon after. But their canoes were all there. A wreath was found, the tell-tale wreath to the eye of Josiah, for none but Esther could have



A Pequot Chief.

CHAPTER II.

A pursuit was at once resolved upon. Hastily fitting up their largest canoe with supplies, and accompanied by two faithful Indian allies, Wampeag and Catoonah, all well armed, they started for the islands (now Norwalk Islands) a short distance from the mouth of the river, thinking that if their fears were true, and Esther had been abducted by that tribe, they had probably stopped there over night, and might not yet have left. Love, filial affection, and revenge, nerved the oars, and they were not long in reaching the islands. As they had surmised, the Indians had stopped there; but they were now gone. The embers from a recent fire were still warm; the print of the same moccasins was visible; the prow of the same canoe had left its mark in the sand. Burning with impatience and rage, and resolved to lose their lives if need be, in the attempt to save her, they started at once for Long Island, feeling sure from so many indications, that their foes were Nehantics, living near what is now known as Eaton's Neck.

But to return to Esther, whom we left gathering flowers, little dreaming of danger. She had wandered from the path

in quest of some rare colors with which to deck the brow of her lover, and having sufficient for her purpose, seated herself near a thick copse and finished her wreath. As she was looking with admiration upon her work, her cheeks flushed with the thought of how pleased Josiah would be, she was suddenly seized by four dusky Pequots. Before she had time to make any outcry, she was gagged, tied, and hurried into the woods. Making a wide detour through the woods, which were then continuous from Pequot Swamp to the Sasco, the Indians dragged the almost insensible Esther to a bend in the Sasco, (where now stands the dwelling of Capt. Thorp,) and there meeting two comrades in waiting with a canoe, hastily embarked and glided down the river to a dense clump of woods near its mouth, where they waited until, under cover of the darkness, they could proceed in safety. As soon as it was fairly dark they left the river, and hugging along the land, stopped at the place where Esther, a few hours before, had so happily tripped ashore. Here they purposely dropped the wreath, and the arrow which had formerly belonged to a Nehantic, and leaving plenty of traces in the sand, they started for the islands. Staying there until near midnight, and leaving fuel enough on the fire to last till morning, they then doubled on their track, and returning to Sasco River, were, long before daylight, snugly ensconced in their Pequot lair; succeeding well, as we have seen, in throwing Enoch and his party off the trail.

CHAPTER III.

So intent were the pursuers on the object they had in view, so earnest in their purpose to rescue Esther, that they had hardly noticed the heavy swell of the sea from a violent northeaster, which then, as now, was common to September. The wind blew almost a gale, and was increasing every moment. They had proceeded about half the distance from the islands to Long Island, when Enoch, who seemed to have a presentiment of his fate, exclaimed to his companions. "we shall never reach the shore! O, my poor Esther, I shall never see you again!" Their frail bark soon after began to take in water. Still by bailing and using the utmost skill to keep her trimmed, they succeeded in getting within a mile of the shore, near the reef, when they were capsized. Enoch, with one look of despair, sank, and was not seen after. Josiah and the two Indians clung to the boat, and nearly exhausted, drifted ashore.

The Nehantics, though not friendly to the tribe on this side, yet had enough of human kindness in their hearts to befriend a shipwrecked company. Josiah and his companions were tenderly cared for, and they learned from the Nehantics,

without exciting their suspicions, that none of their tribe had made any voyages to the north shore within several days. Grief, the double bereavement, the loss of his beloved and of him who was as a father, had well-nigh unmanned Josiah, and with a heavy heart he made preparations for returning.

The next morning, the storm having subsided, they started. On their way they stopped again at the islands to see if they could discover any more traces of Esther and her captors. That her abductors had been there was plain; but the Nohanties were not the guilty party. Who could it have been? They again examined the beach. The footprints of Esther were plainly visible, for the Pequots had unbound her after reaching the islands. On looking further, where there was a spot of smooth clean sand, the tracks appeared to have a method—a design about them, and examining them closely, they could plainly make out the word “Pequot” imprinted by her feet in the sand. This gave them a clue, and yet a faint one. Of the history of the battle they were familiar, knowing that the Pequots were all killed or taken away prisoners, except the few that joined the Mohegans. Had some of that few returned, and with their white captive gone back to the Mohegans?

Oh, with what a feeling of loneliness and almost utter despair Josiah gazed upon that word in the sand. He could imagine how she, intently watching her masters lest they should discover her intentions, had endeavored to guide her friends in their pursuit. Those dear foot prints seemed to him the last of Esther. Hope of seeing her again had nearly fled.

Sadly they turned the prow of their boat homeward. No Esther—no Enoch. How could Josiah break the tidings to

the mother—the wife. Had they come back—this party of rescuers—bringing the darling object of their search, with what alacrity their little craft would have sped over the intervening water. But now, instead of one to them as dead, another, Enoch, the head—the chief of the little family, was gone. How languidly the canoe crept towards the landing. How they dreaded to meet the anxious, bereaved one.

CHAPTER IV.

To Mary the blow was overwhelming. To be deprived of her husband and her daughter, and she in a strange land, an exile from the home of her kindred; it was well nigh insupportable. The sympathy of the little community was aroused, and not only their sympathy, but their anger. It seemed to be the one opinion among the Indians, that Esther had been carried off to the Mohegans. The sachem was indignant that a sneaking Pequot should dare to steal his pale faced daughter, as he regarded her. Wampeag and Catoonah offered to go in disguise to the Mohegan country, and if they found her, one of them was to return for help to assist in the rescue, and the other to remain near, to shield her, as far as possible, from harm. They started on their hazardous journey, but with little hope of success. The anguish and excitement of the last few days was too much for the not over robust Josiah. He was prostrated for weeks, and seemed not long for earth.

The Pequots in their secure retreat were gloating over their prospect of revenge. Their captive they treated kindly in their rude way, not being yet ready to take her life—the

final satiation of their hate. They knew the value of their prize, for, unperceived, they had often been near the dwelling of Enoch, before the capture of Esther, and knew the high esteem in which she was held. The torturing—the death of one such pale face, was to them an equivalent to the torturing and death of scores of red men. During the day they did not venture far from their hiding place, except to fish on the thickly wooded banks of the Sasco. They avoided the friendly Indians, and if seen, being dressed like them, they escaped detection. At night, leaving one or two in charge of their prisoner, the others would travel miles away to gather clams, oysters, and other food.

Esther had become almost a stoic. Sorrow had benumbed her faculties. She did not dread death; to her it would be a relief. The past happy life was like a dream. The few weeks she had been imprisoned seemed an age. Where she was she knew not. The islands to which she was taken immediately after her capture, she was familiar with, having often visited them with her parents and Josiah; but before they returned, the Pequots had blindfolded her. She little thought that not a mile intervened between her and home.

CHAPTER V.

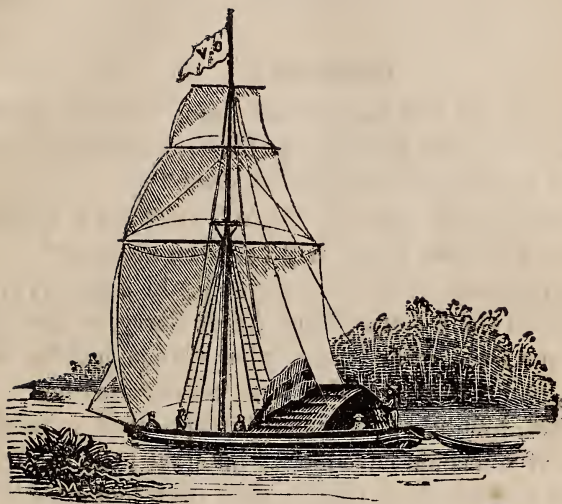
Three months rolled by. The two Indians had come back, but brought no tidings of Esther. They found that the remnant of the Pequots had not joined the Mohegan tribe. Josiah had recovered in some degree his wonted strength, but the fire of his manhood was gone; the light of his life had, to him, been put out. Sometimes he would fish or hunt with his Indian friends, but these sports had lost much of their zest. Twice, lately, on the banks of the Sasco, after a light snow, they had noticed tracks of a moccasin similar to those seen in the sand, at the landing, the morning after her abduction. They appeared to proceed from and go towards the dense thicket in the swamp. This copse had never been entered since the battle. It was most difficult of access, and a sort of supernatural dread seemed to affect the minds of the Griswold family and the Indians in regard to it; and no wonder, for around it lay bleaching the bones of many a Pequot. The more Josiah thought of the similarity of the tracks in the snow and those in the sand, the more he felt convinced that they were made by the same feet. All at once it occurred to him that Esther was in that thicket. So sudden was the thought that

his brain fairly reeled with excitement. As soon as he became more calm, he resolved to immediately explore this part of the swamp, and hastily told a few trusty Indians of his plans. Knowing well that if the Pequots were there, they would naturally leave at night, or most of them, for their food, as soon as it was dark, Josiah and his friends stealthily approached the thicket on the side toward Sasco river, until they were as near as possible without being discovered. They had not long to wait, when five Pequots passed out, so near as almost to touch them in their place of concealment. Waiting until they had gone far beyond hearing, Josiah, with feelings excited to an intense degree, led the way in the direction the Pequots had just come. With a panther like tread, they slowly entered the tangled passage. Those minutes were hours! Soon, a light in the far end of the opening guided their footsteps! Two figures could be plainly seen! It needed iron nerves just then! A few more steps, half walking, half creeping, and Josiah had the swooning Esther clasped in his arms! Her guard, asleep, was quickly dispatched by Josiah's comrades. Loosing her bonds, they at once made their way out. Leaving the Indians to watch for the Pequots, who, returning towards morning, were riddled with bullets, Josiah and Esther, with feelings too happy for utterance, returned to their home, to meet with still another joy; the father—the good Enoch was there! Was it truly him, or his spirit from the dead!

When the canoe upset, the box containing their supplies had drifted near the spot where he arose, and clinging to it, he had been carried by the current some miles below the Neck, and had been picked up, more dead than alive, by a

tribe just starting for the Hudson. He had finally escaped from them, and after many adventures, had returned just in time to make the happiness of that family complete.

The lone settlers were soon made glad by an accession to their number, several more families emigrating from the Providence Colony. Josiah and Esther were married a few months after, and some of their honored descendants are now living in our midst. Enoch and Mary lived to a good old age, happy in their declining years, in having such a son and such a daughter.



A Mill River Craft in 1777.

AN INCIDENT OF MILL RIVER, 1777.

CHAPTER I.

"I tell you what it is, boys," said Amos Perry to his men, "I'm afraid we have a rusty night's work before us; them black heads in the nor'west mean no good."

"I'm just of your opinion, Cap'n," said John Osborne, "in half an hour that squall will be down upon us."

This conversation occurred one evening in June, 1777, on board the little sloop *Racer*, Capt Amos Perry, as she dropped down our river. She was a trim, spruce looking craft, the *Racer*, and a brave looking man commanded her. Her crew, all told, numbered five, and this appeared to be all on board; but if you could have looked into that little cabin you might have counted there twenty more stern looking fellows, all "armed to the teeth."

During the Revolution, Long Island was infested by a nest of loyalists, alias tories, and many were the thieving incursions made by them to our Connecticut shore, carrying off cattle, poultry, anything that would afford aid and comfort to the British troops. These forays were a source of perpetual alarm to the inhabitants on this side of the Sound. So frequent did these visits become, that hardly a night passed, es-

pecially if a dark or foggy one, but that some patriot family would lose a part or the whole of their scanty stock. Most of the able-bodied men being absent with the American army, these tory bands could rob almost with impunity.

On the night in question, this company on board the *Racer* were bound for Long Island. Most of them were boys from the army, home on furlough. They had obtained reliable information that the headquarters of one band of tories was at a small bay a few miles east of what is now known as Stony Brook. That most of the depredations, committed on the people of Mill River and vicinity, were inflicted by this band, they had received almost positive proof, and were determined to retaliate, and if possible, to root them out.

Slowly the *Racer* passed out of the river and entered the Sound. Hardly a ripple on the surface of the water; but the rumble of the thunder, faint at first and gradually growing louder, told of mischief a brewing. They had sailed but a short distance beyond "Flat Island," when the squall burst upon them in its fury. But every thing was snug on board the *Racer*. Hatches were down and fastened, sails all furled and tied, except a small peak of the mainsail, and with this bit of canvass she went scudding before it.

A close observer of Joel Hawkins, mate of the *Racer*, could have discovered a peculiar look in his countenance that night, a sort of grim smile, as if he were about to wipe out some old score against a hated enemy. And no wonder; he had met with a loss the most severe of them all.

A few nights previous the tories had burnt the house of William Palmer, during the absence of all the family but Mary, his daughter—the affianced bride of Joel—and amid the ruins

were found her charred remains. What cared he, as he paced the deck, for the howling wind, the dismal thunder, or the shot of the tories. He heeded none of these; his thoughts were of her who had perished so sadly, so suddenly. When the time came to strike, a double revenge would nerve his arm.

The storm was a severe one—the wind blew fearfully. Fortunately it was from the northwest, fair for them, and now under bare poles they were fast nearing the Island. By exceeding good luck and skillful seamanship, the *Racer* was rounded to just inside of a friendly point, that projected nearly across the mouth of the bay, near which was the tory rendezvous.

“It is an ill wind that blows nobody any good,” as the tories thought in this case. When a strange sloop was discovered next morning, awkwardly getting up sails and anchor, it appeared perfectly plain to them that some Yankee freighter had been driven in for shelter during the storm, and they were soon along side. In the mean time Captain Perry had apparently been trying to get under weigh; but every thing went wrong; the halliards appeared to be caught, the anchor would not “heave.” But he managed to start just as the tories reached him, and by a clumsy jibe ran broadside afoul of the tory sloop.

“Halloa! old Josh!” was the salutation of the tory captain, as he stepped over the side of the *Racer*, followed by a number of his men. “Seems to me you steer rather wild. Got any calves or eggs to sell? If you please I’ll take all you got and give you an order on the King.”

“Wall, yes, I’ve got a few deown in the hole,” said Captain Perry, imitating a down-easter as much as possible, “but it’s ruther hard on a feller. I dunno what my Nanc’ll du to hum;

I'm afeard we shall hev to starve now. I reckoned a site on the shiners them ar' ca'v's 'ud fetch, but I spose you'll hev to hev 'em.

The tories were much amused at the genuiue Yankee they had come across, and were leisurely examining everything about them, until the captain remarked that "Josh might as well come along, sloop, calves and all." One stamp of the foot by Captain Perry, and the men concealed in the cabin were swarming on deck. In less time than it takes to write it, the tories were prisoners. They were completely surprised and offered scarcely a show of resistance. Not a shot was fired; one tory had nearly felt the bullet from the pistol of Joel, but Capt. Perry interposed in time to save his life. The prisoners were at once ordered into the cabin of the *Racer*, the doors securely fastened, and manning the tory sloop, Capt. Perry and his brave band at once started for Mill River, well satisfied with the fruit of one night's work—all but Joel, he did not feel that his wrongs had been avenged, and then and there would have imbrued his hands in the blood of the tories, prisoners though they were, had he not been kept back by his comrades.

CHAPTER II.

Capt Perry's plan worked well. It was his intention before leaving Mill River to slip into the bay during the night, under pretense of making a harbor, and prepare to leave at early morning. To make the bait take the more surely, the men so snugly stowed below were to imitate the bleating of a calf; and this they had begun before daybreak, and well kept up. The storm was not on the programme, but it was greatly in their favor, for the tories concluded at once that a Yankee freighter had been forced to seek that harbor.

The wind was favorable and they were not long in reaching the Connecticut side. Joel had been assigned to the command of the tory sloop, with an intimation from Capt. Perry that he was to remain permanently in charge. Being now in safe water, he began to examine her cabin. The tory captain was evidently a man of taste. Two or three state rooms, though on a small scale, Joel found to be fitted up with elegance. One of them was fastened on the inside. Surely some one must be there! He listened—he heard a low moan! Knocking at the door, it was reluctantly opened, and—What! was he in the land of spirits! or had the ghost



U. S. Mail Coach in 1890.

of Mary come back to earth to upbraid him for not avenging her death? But no—this fainting, swooning being at his feet, was Mary, in body, real, perceptible to the touch!

At the sacking and burning* of the house, one of the tories had found a bottle of brandy, and drinking freely of it became insensible; not being missed by his companions he had been burned in the building. As Mary was not to be found, her friends very naturally mistook the blackened, almost consumed mass, to be all that remained of her. Before the Revolution, the captain of the tory sloop lived in Mill River, and becoming enamored of Mary, had endeavored to gain her hand, but did not succeed in his suit. At the breaking out of hostilities he had espoused the cause of his country's enemy, and finding the neighborhood too hot for him, fled to Long Island. Giving up all hope of gaining her by fair means, he had recourse to foul—stealing her away† and detaining her as a prisoner in his craft; yet treating her in all other respects with every kindness, hoping that time would bring her over.

The conflict was carried on so quietly, and ended so quickly, that Mary had no intimation of it whatever, and when the knock was heard at her door, she supposed the tory captain was again to annoy her with his importunities. Her joy at meeting with her betrothed, her deliverer, can better be imagined than described.

Great joy in Mill River that day as the captor-sloop and the captured came in with their precious cargoes. Capt. Perry and his men gave one deafening hurrah, which was answered by an echoing shout from the shore. The adventure had been noised abroad, and from far and near the people flocked

to the wharf to hear of their success or discomfiture. The tory prisoners, thirty in number, were taken ashore, strongly guarded for a few days, and then marched to New London. Joel and Mary were the "lions" of Mill River for a long time after. Mary was regarded almost as one from the dead. The stone in the church-yard that marked her supposed tomb was removed, and another, bearing the simple inscription, "TORY," placed in its stead. In two weeks from the time the solemn funeral rites had been read in the church, another service was heard within its walls, pronouncing Joel Hawkins and Mary Palmer, man and wife.

Joel re-named the sloop "Mary," and for many a year, freighting between Mill River and New York, she did far better service than when under her former owners. The people of Mill River enjoyed almost entire immunity from tory inroads after that, and to this day revere Captain Perry and his brave band, who inflicted so salutary and lasting a punishment on their British foes.

* The burning was against the express order of the Tory commander.

† The night the house was burnt.

[From the "SOUTHPORT CHRONICLE" of February, 1863.]

OUR VILLAGE.

WE see no reason why our village should not grow, and grow rapidly. We are only about two hours' ride from New York, and have communication with that city several times a day; we have a fine, tidal harbor—a harbor that remains open in winter until the East River Narrows are closed; we have wealth in abundance, no village of the size of ours can boast of more; we have plenty of enterprising, public-spirited men, and if one or two of them will but take the lead in any scheme of public improvement, the others will follow.

Southport is an acknowledged great market port. The farmers of Fairfield, Greenfield, Hulls Farms and Greens Farms, come in here as the best place for shipment of their produce to New York. Within the last few years, a large part of the trade of Easton, Weston and Redding, has been diverted from other market channels to this.

We have a fine water power, Spencer's Pond, just out of the village, an excellent site for two or more manufactories;

and manufactories are a part of what we need to build up our village. Look at Bridgeport! its rapid growth is due, in a great measure, to its manufacturing interests. It is rumored that, not long since, an agent of the late Mr. Elias Howe, offered witin \$500 of the price asked for Spencer's Pond, intending to build there an extensive manufactory. Pity some one had not passed round the hat and made up the difference; for only let us get one or two establishments similar to Howe's, and there will be a "stir among the dry bones" of this place.

A project* is under contemplation to supply our village with gas. If our people will take hold of the matter in earnest, in less than six months we can have the beautiful gas light in our dwellings, churches and stores. There are villages half the size of this, that use this economical light. The cost has been figured, and it is estimated that gas can be manufactured here and furnished us at about the price of kerosene. One great item of trouble and expense—the breaking of so many lamp chimneys—would then certainly be disposed of.

"Last but not least," if *we* do say it, of our present and prospective advantages, we would make mention of the "CHRONICLE." Although not of mammoth size or huge pretensions, it is, we think, no detriment to our village; on the contrary, it is a benefit, and can be made a great benefit. Its

columns will ever be open for discussion of any matter of interest to our community, and we hope our citizens will avail themselves of the privilege.

In short, everything is in our favor; and we repeat, there is no reason why our village should not grow rapidly.

* Feb. 1869.—It has been for the present abandoned.

[From the "SOUTHPORT CHRONICLE" of February, 1869.]

Rail Roads.

RAIL ROADS are becoming about as common in the Eastern States, as stage roads were a few years ago. They are spread over this little State of ours as the web of the spider covers the window pane. The State's main rail road artery—the New York and New Haven—has numerous branches, among which are the Housatonic, the Norwalk and Danbury, the Stamford and New Canaan, and the (talked of) Saugatuck Valley, Roads. We hear recently, that the latter is not likely to prove a success. We see no reason why Southport is not an excellent "trunk" terminus for a branch rail road. It is about equi-distant from the Housatonic, and the Norwalk and Danbury roads, and so favorable is the grade, that a road could easily be built from Southport to a point on the Housatonic, near the northern part of Newtown. Such a rail road would be of great benefit to the people of Newtown, Redding, Easton, Weston, and Greenfield; not only accommodating them as travellers, but it would be a most conven-

ient way for their produce to reach the New York market, for the facilities of the harbor and market boats, at this end of the route, are unexcelled anywhere along shore.

These short, branch rail roads, all tending New-York-wards, are a necessity, in the regions so immediately proximate to the great metropolis; and there is no doubt but that one from Southport to a junction with the Housatonic in Newtown, would add greatly to the prosperity of our village.

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